

es is whether all the words of Jesus are recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. For example, the Gospel of Thomas, which was found in Egypt in 1945, claims it contains “the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.” There are 114 sayings attributed to Jesus but no narrative of what He did, and it seems to have been written in Greek in Syria about A.D. 140. But the Gospel of Thomas has many elements that are completely foreign to the biblical gos-

pels. Over the years, it essentially excluded itself because of the fact that it did not harmonize with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

If we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must declare it to be marvelously correct. This shows the tremendous care with which the New Testament has been copied — a care that has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words.

The New Testament is unrivaled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use. There has never been any serious dispute about the authoritative nature of the four gospels.

[Via *Watchman Magazine*. To be continued]

# NAVARRE MESSENGER

February 26, 2017

## Did JESUS Exist?

by Kyle Campbell

An anonymous statement says, “All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of mankind on this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.”

In Revelation 1:8, Jesus re-

fers to Himself as the “Almighty.” This title means “the one who has his hand on everything.” It means that He is able to accomplish everything. We need to be passionate about Jesus and His influence on the world, but in order to do so, we must be convinced that He existed and is who He said He was.

**The Credibility Evidence: Can The Biographies of Jesus Be Trusted?**

Is it really possible to be an intelligent, critically thinking person and still believe that the four gospels were written by the people whose names have been attached to them? If we can have confidence that the gospels were written by the disciples Matthew and John, by Mark, the companion of the disciple Peter, and by Luke, the historian, companion of Paul, we can be assured that the events they record are based on either direct or indirect eyewitness testimony.

We meet on James M Harvell Rd next to the public library in Navarre. Call for directions and more information (850) 939-8109

### Assembly Schedule

#### Sunday

Bible Class for all ages\_9:00 AM

Morning Worship Service\_10:00 AM

Evening Worship Service\_6:00 PM

#### Wednesday

Bible Class for all ages\_7:00 PM

This entire publication and previous issues are available online at [navarrechurchofchrist.net](http://navarrechurchofchrist.net) along with some more useful information

### Navarre church of Christ

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**VISITORS ARE WELCOME!**

The gospels are based on certain historical claims that God uniquely entered into space and time in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Every gospel begins and ends with Jesus (Matthew 1:1; 28:20; Mark 1:1; 16:19; Luke 1:1; 24:51; John 1:1; 21:25). The writers believed that the life of Jesus was the most important event ever. It was meaningless if it was not historically factual that Christ died and was raised from the dead. Therefore, the very ideology that Christians were trying to promote required very careful historical work.

Strictly speaking, the gospels are anonymous. However, the oldest and most significant evidence for the authorship of Matthew, Mark, and Luke goes back to Papias, who in A.D. 125 affirmed that Mark had carefully and accurately recorded Peter's eyewitness observations. Papias also said that Matthew had preserved the teachings of Jesus as well. Irenaeus, writing about A.D. 180, confirmed the traditional authorship of all the gospels.

There are no known competitors for the authorship of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Authorship was just not in dispute among the early Christians. Furthermore, the early testimony is unanimous that John the apostle — the son of Zebedee — wrote the gospel.

There would not have been any motivation to lie by claiming that these men wrote the gospels when they really did not. They were unlikely characters. Mark and Luke were not even among the Twelve. Matthew was, but as a former tax collector, he would have been the most infamous character next to Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus! Contrast this with what happened when the fanciful apocryphal gospels were written much later. People chose the names of well-known and exemplary figures to be their fictitious authors — Philip, Peter, Mary, and James. Those names carried a lot more weight than the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

There are a number of tests that can be applied to the gospels to determine their credibility. First, the intention test seeks to determine whether it was the stated or implied intention of the writers to accurately preserve history. You do not find the outlandish flourishes and blatant mythologizing that you see in a lot of other ancient writings. They wanted to record what actually occurred. Second, the character test measures the evidence of dishonesty or immorality that might taint the ability or willingness of the writers to transmit history accurately. As far as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are concerned, there is no evidence to suggest that they were anything but people of great integrity. They were willing to live out their beliefs even to the point of being put to grisly deaths, which shows great character. Third, the consistency test attempts to determine if the gospels hopelessly contradict one another. The gospels are extremely consistent with each other by ancient standards, which are

the only standards by which it is fair to judge them. Fourth, the bias test analyzes whether the gospel writers had any biases that would have colored their work. The disciples had nothing to gain except criticism, ostracism, and martyrdom. They certainly had nothing to win financially. If anything, this would have provided pressure to keep quiet or downplay Him — yet because of their integrity, they proclaimed what they saw, even when it meant suffering and death. Fifth, the cover-up test evaluates if the gospel writers conveniently forgot to mention details which would have been embarrassing or hard to explain. If they did not leave out this type of material, is it really plausible to believe that they outright added and fabricated material with no historical basis?

#### **The Documentary Evidence: Were The Biographies of Jesus Reliably Preserved?**

There are no originals of the books of the Bible. All we have are copies of copies. This is not an issue unique to

the Bible; all ancient documents encounter the same issue. What the New Testament has in its favor is the unprecedented number of copies that have survived. The more often you have copies that agree with each other, especially if they emerge from different geographical areas, the more you can cross-check them to figure out what the original document was like.

The quantity and quality of New Testament material is almost embarrassing in comparison with other works of antiquity. We have New Testament copies dating within a couple of generations from the writing of the originals, whereas in the case of other ancient texts, maybe five, eight, or ten centuries elapsed between the original and the earliest surviving copy. Next to the New Testament, the greatest amount of manuscript testimony is of Homer's Iliad, which was an epic story to the ancient Greeks. There are fewer than 650 Greek manuscripts of it today. Some are quite fragmentary. Furthermore, these manuscript pieces are 1,000

years old when compared to the time of writing. But modern scholars have absolutely no reluctance treating the Iliad as authentic. In addition to the Greek manuscripts, we also have translations of the gospels into other languages at a relatively early time (Latin Syriac, Coptic). Beyond these, we have what may be called secondary translations made a little later (Armenian, Gothic, Georgian, Ethiopic).

Distinguished scholars throughout the world agree that there is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of textual attestation as the New Testament. Sir Frederic Kenyon said, "In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament." He further said, "The last foundation for any doubt that the scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed."

Another question which aris-